

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY DACCA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6035

INFO AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 1231

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, BG, IN

SUBJECT: INDIA-BANGLADESH: MOVEMENT ON FARAKKA BARRAGE?

1. IN COURSE OF A CONVERSATION ON ANOTHER SUBJECT, INDIAN DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER DIXIT TOLD EMBOFF THAT FEBRUARY 22-25 VISIT TO NEW DELHI OF BANGLADESH'S FLOOD CONTROL, WATER RESOURCES AND POWER MINISTER, ABDUR RAB SERNEABAT, MAY HAVE SEEN SOME PROGRESS TOWARD A RESOLUTION OF THE FARAKKA BARRAGE ISSUE. ACCORDING TO DIXIT, BOTH INDIA AND BANGLADESH HAVE ABANDONED ON COST GROUNDS THE IDEA OF A DIVERSION CANAL LINKING THE BRAHMAPUTRA WITH THE GANGA, A SOLUTION WHICH WOULD BE INTENDED TO REPLACE THE WATER DIVERTED TO THE HOOGHLY BY THE FARAKKA BARRAGE. HOWEVER, DIXIT SAYS THAT THE BENGALLEES HAVE RESPONDED FAVORABLY TO AN INDIAN OFFER TO HELP ESTABLISH RESERVOIRS IN NORTHWESTERN BANGLADESH WHICH WOULD BE FED BY THE TISTA, AND IT IS THIS IDEA WHICH MAY BRING AN END TO THE FARAKKA DISPUTE. THE PRESS REPORTED IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE SERNEABAT VISIT THAT THE JOINT RIVER COMMISSION, DEADLOCKED FOR SEVERAL MONTHS, HAS BEEN INSTRUCTED TO COMPLETE ITS REPORT ON SHARING OF GANGA WATERS; THE REPORT IS EXPECTED TO REVEAL BANGLADESH

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TO BE GIVING UP MORE THAN IT WISHES.

2. COMMENT: RESERVOIRS IN NORTHWESTERN BANGLADESH
WILL NOT SERVE THE AREAS WHICH WILL BE DEPRIVED OF
WATER WHEN THE FARAKKA BARRAGE IS OPERATIONAL AND WE
CAN ONLY CONCLUDE THAT
THERE IS A SUFFICIENT TRADE-OFF
FOR THE BDG TO MAKE THE PROPOSITION ATTRACTIVE. WITH
THE MARITIME BOUNDARY ISSUE AS DEADLOCKED AS EVER AND
FARAKKA BARRAGE PERHAPS BEING READIED FOR COMMISSIONING
(DIXIT SAID THAT REPORTS FROM CALCUTTA SUGGEST THE
BARRAGE IS BEING TESTED BUT COULD OFFER NO CONFIRMATION
OF THESE STORIES), SOME SORT OF RESOLUTION ON THIS LONG-
STANDING AND DEEPLY VEXATIOUS ISSUE WOULD BE WELCOME BY
BOTH SIDES. IF THE INDIANS CONCLUDE THAT THEY MUST
GET TOUGH WITH BANGLADESH IN THE BAY OF BENGAL--
PERHAPS BY TURNING SURVEY CRAFT AWAY--HAVING FARAKKA
OUT OF THE WAY WILL BE HELPFUL. IF BANGLADESH HAS TO
CAVE ON THE MARITIME BOUNDARY, IT WOULD DOUBTLESS LIKE
TO POINT WITH PRIDE TO HAVING GOTTEN SOMETHING
SOMEWHERE ELSE FROM THE INDIANS.
CHESLAW

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